

The Merchant House
Washington Boulevard at Dumfries
Prince William County, Virginia

HABS No. VA-91

HABS
VA
76-DUMF
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Eugene Bradbury, District Officer
210 East Franklin St., Richmond,
Virginia.

THE MERCHANT HOUSE
Dumfries, Prince William County, Virginia.

Owner: Brawner .

Date of Erection: Before 1850.

Architect: Not known.

Builder: Not known.

Present Condition: Bad state of disrepair.

Number of Stories: Two.

Materials of Construction: Stone foundation, frame super structure

Other Existing Records: None.

Additional Data: (See following pages)

VA
76-Dumf

THE MERCHANT HOUSE
Dumfries, Prince William County, Virginia.

Although a definite effort was made to obtain information relative to the historical background of this old home, little of interest was forthcoming. The oldest living tenant of this house, a Mrs. R. J. Adamson of Manassas, Virginia, is responsible for such data included in this report.

By whom and when this house was built no one seems to know. It took its present name from a former owner, Mr. Robert B. Merchant, who acquired it around the middle of the 19th Century. Mr. Merchant also owned the larger brick house adjoining (now destroyed), which he sold to the maiden ladies, the Misses Calvert. The theory that it was ever used as a dependency of another larger house has been questioned. On the site of the frame bungalow, the present home of Mr. Brawner, stood a large frame barn and between the barn and the brick hotel to the south, stood side by side a smoke house and a corn house, both of frame. The well now standing beside the highway in Mr. Brawner's front yard has been in use as far back as anyone can remember.

In the following description of the house proper, I quote from a letter from Mrs. Adamson: "I am sure there was a four inch moulding in hall and dining room which was mahogany to match the large mantelpiece over the open fireplace. The hall had front and back doors opposite and a stairway to the left as you enter. In front there were wooden steps and a small landing probably 6' x 8'. Inside, the walls were all white, fireplace was painted red, also the hearth. The outside as I remember it was gray, no windows were closed or added. As I remember there was a partition with door leading from hall to living room. I do not remember as to shingles - but do not think they had round ends but straight. This house was used as a dwelling and in no connection with the brick house opposite. As to the holes in the living room floor I have no recollections at all. I left Dumfries when I was eleven years old - consequently I don't remember much about it.....It had a large basement under, which was used as a kitchen."

Basement and foundation. The stone walls were, I believe, laid up with little or no mortar. Since their erection, however, mortar has been used for pointing, patching, and replacement of stone which became loose or fell out. Traces remain of the exterior having been whitewashed at one time. Wherever piercings

VA
76 DOME
1

in walls have been obviously sealed, it is so shown on drawings. That other openings in walla existed at one time is quite possible but patches and vines which cover wall prevent definite determination of such features. The smaller stone used here is of slate character and varies widely in colors - thoea predominating being dull red browns and dull blue greys. The heavier stones at corners are brown sandstone and very probably cut at Aquia Creek quarries. Inside, the stone walls show signs of having been white-washed at one time. Little evidence that this was used as a kitchen can be observed. There is no flue opening in the arched opening at this level. In fact, the construction of the chimney as shown on drawings would not permit use of fire on this floor.

First Floor. The sills and some of the framing here are of oak, the remainder, yellow pine. The floors, interior doors, and trim are of pine, the former appear to be a later replacement, the latter original but stained red. This probably accounts for Mrs. Adamson's report that this was mahogany. The color closely approximates the color of the red paint used on the exterior walls, but has obviously penetrated the wood more deeply than any kind of paint normally would. Hence, the decision that it was a stain. The stairway shows no sign of ever having been painted. The plaster walls and ceilings show the first coat of color to be as shown on color chart.

Both photographs and drawings show that a wood chair rail, mantle pieces, door, and cornice have been removed from living room. No description of these is available. The smaller wood cornice running across the middle of the living room ceiling, and holes beneath it in the floor boards, cannot be accounted for by Mrs. Adamson. (See first floor plan for location.) That some type of partition existed here at one time seems probably, possibly before incorporation of stairway and central front window.

Examination of brickwork around fireplace facing reveals fact that size of opening has been reduced. The fact that two flues were needed to supply draft for such an opening substantiatea such a theory.

The rusticated walls, quoins, doors, and trim were originally painted a dull red (see color chart). The clapboards on the west end appear to be original but show no trace of paint. The clapboards at east end are very obviously new and are unpainted. The cornice front and rear shows no traces of having been painted. This

VA
76-DUMF
1-

whole building except upper part of chimney and the roof has been whitewashed within the past few years, so only minute examination of wood reveals presence of this early paint.

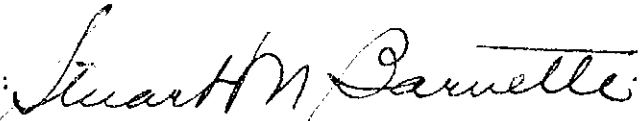
Second Floor. Evidences of a balustrade and newel posts around the stair well exist and are shown on second floor plan. The only trim remaining on this floor is that of the base and door architraves. These are stained to match those on first floor. The plaster walls and ceilings are tinted. (See color chart.) The trim around the opening to the attic space is unpainted.

The fireplace mantle, partition and cuddy doors have been removed, and no description is available. Hinges for the partition door remain, however, and are shown on drawings.

The Chimney, reflecting a distinctly Elizabethan flavor, is one of the most interesting features of the house and incorporates almost every conceivable brick bond - Flemish, Headers, English, and Common. It is said to be one of the finest examples of the work of early Scottish immigrants to this locality.

Unfortunately the remaining days of this building are numbered, for it is in a bad state of disrepair.

Report by:



Stuart M. Barnette,
Senior Architectural Foreman,
Fredericksburg-Spotsylvania National Military Park.